

In this corner—

**You'll smell the resin
and feel the sting of eight-ounce gloves
in this graphic story of the prize ring. The author,
who has himself fought professionally, makes
his fiction debut on these pages**

by Jack Kerney

Illustrated by Glen Thomas

IN the fourth round the tempo is faster. It usually is. Two, three rounds, and the juice in your legs has warmed; you've done your scouting, planned your offense. You're ready for the blitz. Only in this case the other guy is ready too. And he's better equipped, faster, younger. Buzzy Williams hasn't lost his leer. It's part of him now. Like Big Joe, the Champ, with his poker face; you'd think you were seeing things if he smiled during a fight.

A reddish glove explodes in your eyes. Your legs go weak. The breath catches in your throat. You grab Buzzy, hold him close, tell him how his laces are loose. He laughs. You knew he would. The gag is as old as boxing itself. Stupid to pull it on a smart guy like Buzzy. He's thinking: "What's Johnny Elliott trying to do, talk me out of the fight?" Sure. And you want him to know it. You give him a blueprint of your plan of battle and ask him to concentrate on it.

"I'll beat you, Buzzy," you tell him. "I know how. You'll never get in the same ring with Big Joe. Never in a million years."

"Tin soldier," he mutters.

You roll under fast, catch him going away with a sharp left and a weak right. His hands don't stop moving; his feet shuffle in and out, in and out, steady, monotonous. He's a machine, well oiled, new. You want to break up this smoothness, throw a wrench in the cogwheels. You try hard to knock him off stride. He comes too close and you rip a short left to the head. Your right splashes on his velvet-smooth body. He laughs, his eyes hard, contemptuous, the disrespect of a student who thinks he has learned everything his teacher has to offer and can beat him at his own game.

The round ends in your corner. While he's returning to his handlers you're on your stool, relaxing. That's one trick he can never take away from you; it took you years of experience to learn the art of saving those extra few seconds. When a guy gets old that trick comes in handy. Time is precious between rounds.

You lean back on your stool and let the soft sponge play with your body. The cool water runs down your chest and belly. It feels good. You want that gong never to ring again. Then you think of Sheila, of Buzzy, of Big Joe and the million-dollar gate. You sit up straight and wait for the bell.

Yesterday I was news again. Hot news. The reporters and photogs met me at the station, the same bunch of scribblers that dogged my footsteps in the days before the big chocolate boy blasted me from my diadem. Big Joe, a stick of dynamite in each fist, exploding them one at a time, leaving me on the stained canvas looking up at a suddenly

black sky, and strolling nonchalantly to a neutral corner. But that's ancient history. . . .

Kenny of the Trib yanked at my olive-drabs. "Johnny, what round? How long you figure Buzzy'll hang around?"

He meant how long before my legs would be requisitioned to relieve the rubber shortage. He figured I couldn't take Buzzy Williams. Not that I gave a hoot. Buzzy Williams, the boy I'd managed and trained before I threw the whole thing into the ashcan to join Uncle Sam's Army. Why beat the kid I had nursed toward the championship? Why not sit back and watch him go on to take the brightest diamond of them all?

If I beat him, I thought, it means another session with Big Joe. What kind of picnic is that? I'm in the Army now. I want to stay healthy long enough for a crack at them Jap monkeys. Guns, teeth, anything, so long as they don't pile on me more than three at a time. Besides, I'm thirty-one. The music in my legs has dropped from a fox-trot to a slow waltz. And Buzzy can fight. I ought to know. Wasn't I his teacher?

It was hot news, Johnny Elliott coming out of retirement for one fight, donating his entire purse to the Army Relief.

"Give us a Karloff look, Johnny." They propped me for pictures. I fixed my garrison cap. I smiled. Lieutenant Conroy, my handler and trainer, Chick and Teddy, my buddies, got around for another snap.

"Johnny," the *News* said, "after Williams you get matched with Private Joe, the Champ. A chance for you to be the only guy who's ever won back the title. Ain't that something to shoot at?"

"Sure," I laughed. "Only hara-kiri is patented by them Japs."

"You mean Buzzy?"

"I mean Joe."

"Johnny," the *Eagle* said, "Buzzy Williams has been saying how he's gonna put you out for the duration."

I shrugged. "Buzzy ain't no bum. But maybe I can get him to change his mind."

"If he wins, Buzzy'll fight the Chocolate Soldier. A million-buck gate, at least. Buzzy gives ten percent again, keeps a chunk for himself. If you win it'll be you and Joe, in September. A million bucks for the Army and Navy, nobody cutting in."

I laughed. "Sounds good. Only let's talk about it after tomorrow night's show. Fellers—"

I stopped short. My ticker began to pound like mad as I



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saw her elbowing her way through the crowd. Six months since I'd seen her, on my last furlough. She was so beautiful she took my breath away as only she could do. She gave me a quick pecking sort of kiss.

I wanted to grab and hold her. But she didn't give me a chance. She took my arm and smiled for the pictures. But they had stopped flashing bulbs. The smile came off her face.

"C'mon, boys," I said.

"I'm out of bulbs," was the complaint.

Sheila said, "If I did a strip tease you'd find some."

"Maybe," one piped up. "Maybe not."

Lieutenant Conroy smiled. "Let's go, Johnny. Perhaps it's best that we skip pictures with dames. Might not look right, if you ask me."

"Who's asking you?" Sheila snapped. "Any picture with Sheila Trent is worth a million dollars in publicity."

"C'mon, guys," I said to the photogs. "A little action, please."

For me they did it. It wasn't Sheila's fault. It went back to the time Sheila Trent played the lead in "Sunny Side Up," the hit that ran for eighteen months on Broadway; before she went into her fan routine in any burlesque house that had the price. In the prosperity days of "Sunny Side Up," Sheila had refused to pose for pictures. Once she busted a camera. What could they expect from a great star who was on edge? She hadn't meant to go temperamental. She told me so herself, later, when the boys started to avoid her, refusing to publicize anything she did or said.

"How's this, boys?" She lifted her dress above her knees.

"Wrap it around your neck," somebody muttered. "See if I get excited."

THE bulbs exploded. The *Journal* photog snapped his fingers. "Why didn't somebody tell me to put in a plate?"

Chick and Teddy shifted from one foot to the other. Lieutenant Conroy said, "C'mon, Johnny, we got a date at Stillman's; just a light workout."

Then: "Hiyah, boys, Well, if it ain't the big parade." It was Buzzy. "Hiyah, teacher," he said to me. "Five and five is ten; you're out. Correct?"

We shook hands. He was big, bigger than I'd ever seen him. Handsome Buzzy. He and Sheila exchanged glances. Maybe I should have seen then. But guys in love can get pretty blind. All I saw was

Buzzy Williams, the boy I was going to tangle with, looking like a picture out of a physical culture magazine.

"How y'feel, Buzzy?" I said.

He winked in the direction of the reporters. "You'll find out, Johnny," he said coolly. "And how!"

It gives a guy a funny feeling to have his pupil lord it over him.

I slapped his shoulder. "That's okay, Buzzy. I got some tricks I never got around to show you."

He guffawed. "You kill me, Johnny, you kill me. I got a date with Joe—after you retire again for the last time. I'm shooting for the big money that's begging for me to come and get it." He fingered my O.D.'s as if appraising the material. Almost whispering, he said, "No tin soldier is gonna stop me."

The reporters looked up from their notebooks. They were tense, waiting. What was I supposed to do, haul off and swing for his chin? Buzzy talked on. More hot news for the sports pages. He told how he would beat me. The pupil versus the teacher. The reporters wrote fast, stopping every once in a while to see how I was taking it. I grinned. What else was there to do?

Lieutenant Conroy said disgustedly, "Johnny, how long are we going to listen to these blank '75's?"

Buzzy stopped. His black button-eyes were full of scorn as they swept Lieutenant Conroy's trim figure.

"Soldier," he said, "you guys never learn. You know what superior forces are? You should. You been crying that every time a Jap busted into you. That's me—superior forces. Johnny Elliott's got the same chance you had in the Pacific."

He's right, I thought. Superior forces in his arms and legs, in his youth. There's no getting around it. It's been two years since I laced on the gloves. I'm no spring chicken. I'm Johnny Elliott, veteran of seventy-two fights.

They looked at me, the reporters and Lieutenant Conroy. I was supposed to say or do something.

Lieutenant Conroy whispered, "Johnny, you look like you want to kiss both his cheeks before you hand him a medal."

"Don't be a fool," I said. "Why get up in the air? He's just talking. Builds up the gate."

The reporters closed their books, wished me good luck.

"And a fifty-ton tank," Buzzy said. "You'll need it."

"You're in for a rude surprise," Lieutenant Conroy said.

I wish I had felt that way too. Not that I was scared, but I knew how the land lay. Buzzy Williams was as good as he thought he was, which was plenty.

Kenny of the *Trib* rested his hand on my shoulder. "You'll do okay, Johnny," he said. "Only don't let them pat your back. They might leave a knife sticking in it."

He looked at Sheila when he said it. She glared and a blotchy flush spread from her half-exposed breasts to her high cheekbones. That made two hints in the space of a few minutes, but my brains were dormant.

As we went up the ramp Lieutenant Conroy said, "Fresh individual, isn't he?"

"Buzzy? He's a kid."

Lieutenant Conroy stopped short and faced me. "Johnny, don't you want to win?"

"Sure, Ernie. But why worry? The main thing is that we'll make dough for the Emergency Relief. Why get all het up about incidentals?"

He snorted. "It wouldn't be a bad thing for Army morale, not to speak of the championship money the soldiers could use, if you made a successful comeback."

YOU think you're doing fine. Suddenly there is the dry taste of blood in your mouth and the back of your neck hurts. A left keeps jumping in your face. Every time Buzzy raises his hand you feel a sting. He moves like sweet music on his feet. Handsome Buzzy. Not a mark on his beautiful body. The sign of the clever boxer. Buzzy was always smart. But you're smarter. You've got to be.

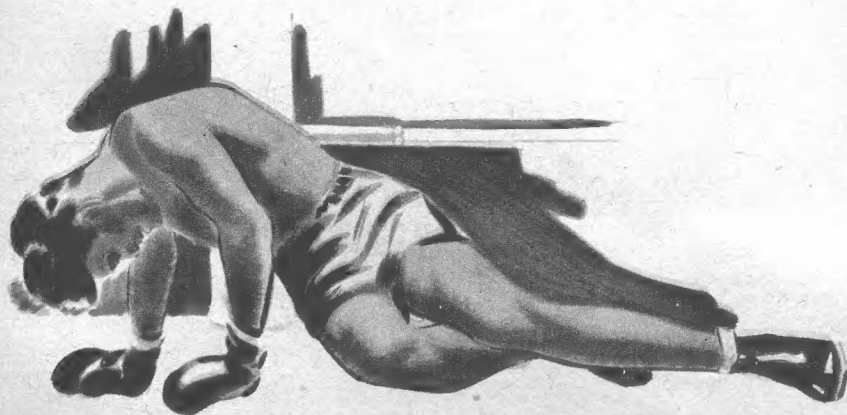
You tie him in a clinch and punish him with tricks he never quite mastered. You talk to him, whisper in his ear. It's the seventh round now, twenty-one minutes of almost continuous taunting. He's stopped answering long ago.

You move inside, throw two quick bombs to the head. He dances away, his left stabbing. But he's hurt. You've hurt him. You follow up fast. You want to smash that beautiful pan, cut it into red ribbons. You want the claret to flow from his nose and ears to mix with the thin streams of sweat running down his hairless chest. But the machine doesn't falter. He doesn't lose his stride. He comes back, swinging, punching straight from the shoulder.

You realize that now the punches hurt more than they did a few years back. They sting and cut. You go berserk for a second and lash out wildly, but Buzzy glides away, light and easy, and the crowd laughs. You try to catch the leather on your arms and shoulders, but you are getting tired. Your right hand is beginning to throb with pain.

One, two, three. You count the blows. Then you can't count any more. Like you're looking at the mouth of a blasting cannon, funny dirty lights go past and there's a roar in your head. Then you remember this is a fight, the winner to meet Big Joe for the championship, and you're back in the ring, trying to catch up with Buzzy Williams.

You didn't see whether it was a left or



a right. You don't care. All you know is that you're on hands and knees, shaking the fog out of your head. The referee is standing over you, his hand waving in your face. For the second time in your life you've been knocked down. Something only Big Joe could do. You've got time to look around. For a second, anyway, a long second. You see Lieutenant Conroy frantically motioning for you to get up. You see hundreds of khaki-clad figures on their feet, yelling something. You see Private Joe, a sly look on his chocolate pan.

He knows you'll get up. Everybody knows that Johnny Elliott can take it. No punch can keep him down for ten seconds. You're tempted to stretch out on the canvas and call it a day, but you stagger erect. Your feet are so clumsy. All that training you put in, did it really help. You think of a lot of things, a million things all mixed into one blurred picture. Then the picture clears. . . .

THAT night I stayed out later than usual. It was legitimate; the night before a fight a fighter takes it easy, relaxes, sleeps late the next morning. I called up Sheila and dated her for the Banjo Club.

When I hung up, Lieutenant Conroy said, "Why not a bench in the park, where you can sit back and rest? A night club isn't exactly the proper atmosphere for a boxer."

I laughed. "Night club? Man, that's a sacrilege. Treason of the worst sort. This joint is a haven for jitterbugs. I just itch for a hunk of jive, nice and hot."

"You've done enough roadwork. Mister, no dancing."

"Who's dancing? We can sit and watch, can't we?"

"We?"

"We. Unless—well, what's the use of talking? Lieutenant Conroy, my pal, you couldn't—you just couldn't let me go alone with Sheila, just this once?"

"Brother soldier, you said a double mouthful. Chick and Teddy are sprucing up for a Broadway parade but Lieutenant Ernest Conroy has strict orders to keep you under surveillance; it'll be worth my stripes and a court-martial should you get a splintered finger."

It wasn't long after we were seated in the Banjo Club when Buzzy Williams, flanked by Jacobs, his manager, and one of his hangers-around, came in. My nostrils twitched. Trouble. I could smell it. Why, I don't know. It was the same kind of feeling I got that Sunday, December 7th, just before everything went blooey.

Sheila saw him first. "There's Buzzy." Lieutenant Conroy played with his rough chin. "Johnny," he said, "why not invite Mr. Williams over to our table?"

I gave him a look. "Ernie, Buzzy is a sensitive kid, nice but hot-headed. He's jumpy, especially just before a fight. Being it's quiet and peaceful here, why turn this joint into another front?"

"Okay." He shrugged. "Sheila, let's dance."

They joined the jitterbugs, dancing to a waltz that had been pepped up to please the crowd. I hummed a couple of

bars, my fingers played a tattoo on the checkered tablecloth. But I couldn't get rid of that funny feeling. Trouble with a capital T.

I lost track of Sheila and Lieutenant Conroy. When next they came within range, Buzzy was dancing with Sheila while Lieutenant Conroy was dodging elbows.

When he succeeded in reaching our table he said, "Johnny, that dame and Buzzy Williams are a little too friendly. Being he's in the enemy camp—"

"She's a spy," I said.

"Johnny, look at the way he holds her."

"Cut it, Ernie." I didn't like it, neither what he said nor the way Buzzy and Sheila had stopped in a corner to gab.

"Johnny," Lieutenant Conroy said, "sometimes our perspective is knocked akimbo. It takes a Pearl Harbor to set us right."

"I don't get it."

"You and that girl."

"Her name is Sheila."

He leaned back in his chair. He blew into his fist. I looked away. "Forget it, Johnny," he said quietly. "I was just making conversation."

When Buzzy brought Sheila back to us Lieutenant Conroy said, "Sit down, Mr. Williams."

Buzzy hesitated, then pulled a chair under him. "Sure."

Lieutenant Conroy said, "Mr. Williams, I invite you on the condition that you cut out the popping off, my ears being kind of sensitive."

Buzzy's grin disappeared. He said, "General, I wouldn't give a damn if those shutter ears were shot off." He turned his back to the lieutenant. "Johnny, how you think you're gonna do tomorrow night?"

Before I could answer Lieutenant Conroy said, "Mr. Williams, after the fight, when you come out of the ether, I'll explain how it happened."

I felt like an actor who had forgotten his cue. Buzzy said over his shoulder, "Johnny hasn't got a chance. You know it. Everybody knows it."

"But you don't. That's why you're here. You've still got a lot of respect for the old master."

"That's a lot of malarkey."

"Stop trembling when you say it, Mr. Williams."

Buzzy got to his feet, almost upsetting the table. He rocked from his heels to his toes and back again. His lips moved but made no sound. He was ready to bust.

I said quickly, "Fellers, maybe I ought to be let in on this. I feel like I'm stuck in a Bataan foxhole and can't get out."

"Me too," Sheila said, a little high. "Boys, behave."

SOME dancers had stopped to look at us. The bandleader glanced nervously over his shoulder. He jerked the baton sharply. The music got louder and louder, almost drowning out our voices. Buzzy's friends came pushing toward us.

His manager cried, "What you trying to pull, Elliott?"

"Me?" I laughed. "I'm only the door-man."

Jacobs said, "Buzzy, let's go. Time you hit the hay."

Lieutenant Conroy said, "Mr. Williams will need all the rest he can get. But it won't make much difference."

"Shut up," Buzzy said.

"Anything to oblige," Lieutenant Conroy said. "Come, Johnny, let's go to bed, not that we have to. It just isn't respectable to be seen out so late—with undesirables."

Buzzy said, "I'm dying from laughing, General."

Lieutenant Conroy said, "Would you mind breathing in the opposite direction? Your breath isn't exactly pleasant."

I stepped between them. Jacobs shoved me. Buzzy swung at Lieutenant Conroy. I pushed his shoulder, throwing away the punch. Buzzy turned on me, snarling. His left hand came up from the floor. My right landed first. Buzzy went back on his heels, crashed into the table and sat down hard. Sheila came at me like a wildcat. I don't mind slugging guys. But fighting off crazy dames is something else.

Then some woman screamed and everybody began milling around us. It was as if someone had dumped a bomb into the mob, and everybody was looking for the nearest shelter. Lieutenant Conroy grabbed my arm.

"Johnny, them M. P.'s have no respect for superiors. Let's get moving."

Outside we waited for Sheila, who, somehow, had got lost in the scuffle.

"Ernie," I said, "what's the big idea?"

"Come again?" he said blankly.

"You were looking for trouble. You deliberately got Buzzy to dance with Sheila. Then you picked a fight with him."

"Me?" He shrugged, sighed. "Okay, you win. I just don't like him, that's all."

I said, "It ain't enough."

Sheila came out. She glared at Lieutenant Conroy. "Wise guy," she said. "You almost caused a riot." She turned to me. "Buzzy is all right. I waited around to find out." She wasn't finished with Lieutenant Conroy. As the car hit into high, she said, "Mister, it couldn't be that you are trying to get Johnny all steamed up about Buzzy—"

FIGHTING mad is what you mean," Lieutenant Conroy said. "That's what I tried to do. I saw Buzzy Williams come in." He snapped his fingers. "I figured it out just like that. I'm a fast thinker."

"Stinker is the word," she said.

"Johnny," Lieutenant Conroy said, "what do I have to do to convince you that he can be taken. A little harder and that sock would have put Mr. Williams out for good."

"Maybe. It was a surprise punch that I'll have a helluva time springing in the ring. Buzzy'll be on his toes, sharp-eyed, waiting. Buzzy can box, the best there is. But he'll have to go plenty to beat me, you can bet on that."

"Skip the soft stuff," Lieutenant Conroy said. "I'm not a reporter. Anyway, there was nothing lost by my experiment."

I hoped not, but my right hand, the one that had landed on Buzzy's chin, didn't feel exactly comfortable.

At the hotel, Lieutenant Conroy went upstairs. I told him I'd be along in a few minutes. When he'd gone Sheila said, "Johnny, let's go for a ride. It's so beautiful out, a full (Continued on page 80)



"Do you know a diver named Joe?"

In This Corner

(Continued from page 15) moon with an escort of a million stars. I want to talk to you, Johnny."

"It's late, Sheila. I should be in bed."

"A half hour won't make much difference."

"No, Sheila."

But I did. I'd been away so long. I wanted to hold her soft hand against my face. I wanted to get close and smell the sweet, tantalizing perfume. I wanted to talk, between kisses. Like she said, a half hour wouldn't make much difference; I could sleep later in the morning.

FIFTEEN rounds is a long pull for an old war horse. Tenth round, well past the halfway mark. Bore in, take two to land one. Keep boring. Get close so you can talk to him. "Buzzy, you're a bum. You smell. No steam in your punches. You're getting weaker every second. What'll you do when you run out of powder puffs?" You say that to him and you know you're lying.

You're hurt, blinded, the ring lights are sheets of shimmering gold dancing before your eyes. You bite into the rubber mouthpiece to keep back the sobs that come up from your insides as his gloves sink deep. "Buzzy, you can't hit. Put some oomph behind your punch."

Gloves burst all around you. Buzzy

leans on the punch; he's trying hard to prove you're wrong. The sweat gleams on his powerful shoulders.

The hard gloves thud into your body. God, how they hurt! You try to hurt him back, but he's got that extra juice in his smart legs, enough to take him out of range. Your right hand feels like it's swollen to the size of a balloon. But you keep heaving leather.

Suddenly everything is a black pit. Your hands hang at your sides, two heavy weights that threaten to pull you down to the canvas. You can't move your feet. There's a pain in your hip and you're paralyzed. It's all over. Buzzy comes in. Then you remember tricks. You raise your head high and laugh loud, crazy.

Buzzy stops short. He glances at the referee. He doesn't know what to do. He's lost, bewildered for a second or two. When he realizes, and comes in snarling, his jaw sticking out, he's a second too late. That pain in your side is gone. You can move. Buzzy has lost his big chance.

"You're a bum, Buzzy. Whatsa matter, didn't I teach you anything? I must be a lousy teacher. Or maybe it's you, Buzzy? Where did you pack them brains, Buzzy?"

He growls louder. He doesn't like it. His gleaming forehead is creased in fine wet lines. He's mad as a taunted bull. He wants to hit me through the floor. He

forgets about precision; the machine doesn't work so smoothly now. He wants to trade punches. I oblige him, though with every punch my right hand feels like it's coming off at the wrist.

WE parked the car on a side road in the park. We talked for a minute, saying nothing. I took her in my arms. Her lips were soft and wet. I forgot everything; I forgot the world with its troubles; I forgot tomorrow night. I was on a different planet, a sweet paradise.

She whispered, "Be careful, Johnny. Tomorrow night, I mean."

"I'm always careful."

It felt good having somebody worry about me. Especially Sheila, whose dancing eyes could make your insides do tricks. Sweet Sheila, soft and tempting, with lips that kissed with all the fire of a love whetted by six months' absence.

"Johnny," she said, "Buzzy can fight."

"I'm no cripple."

"His gloves can cut a man's face into a bloody mask. I've seen him do it."

"Maybe he'll make me beautiful," I laughed. "It's only a fight, Sheila. I've had lots of 'em and came out okay. All I got is a touch of potato ear. So what? We'll give the crowd a run for their dough."

"Johnny, that's just it. It's only another fight. Why take punishment when you don't have to? Why get your ears knocked off when you don't get a dime for it?"

It was something in her voice, I guess. Or in her black velvet eyes. Or maybe things were working in back of my head. Suddenly I was back in this world, a crazy fighting world with its Pearl Harbors. . . .

"Sheila," I said, "I don't get it. It's those Hawaiian ack-ack guns. They can make a guy awfully deaf even after he's away from them awhile."

"Don't act dumb, Johnny." There's anger in her sharp tone. "You know what I'm talking about."

"You want me to take a dive?"

"I just don't want you to get hurt. Is that asking too much?"

"Sheila, I never threw a fight in my life."

"For what you're getting out of this one, it won't hurt you."

"That crowd will expect me to give them the best."

"And what's that, Johnny? You're no youngster. You're not expected to be the Johnny Ellicott who was champ."

Sheila, sweet Sheila, with lips that can twist in scorn, who can slap you down gently, with eyes that caress you one moment, only to turn to glassy strangeness the next.

"Let's forget fights," I said. "It's just you and I, here, alone, with only the old man in the moon keeping tabs."

"Promise me you won't be a fool. Box a few rounds—"

"I'm a puncher, not a dancer."

Those things in back of my head were piecing together. Everything added up to an even number. Sheila and Buzzy.

I said, "It isn't me you're worried about." A guy's voice can change so that he hardly recognizes it as his own. It gives you a funny sensation, like you're

hearing yourself talk through a telephone. I could feel her jump. "Who else, Johnny? Somebody been telling you silly things? Who else I got to worry about?" "Buzzy Williams."

"Buzzy? You're crazy, Johnny."

"I'm remembering things . . . you and Buzzy. I must've been blind. They tried to tell me—Kenny of the *Trib*, Ernie. God, Sheila, all those reporters at the station, they must have known and were laughing their heads off."

Funny, how despite your insides being all tied in a hard knot and a pounding in your head, you can still pay attention to the wind whistling through the trees. Like I wasn't part of the scene. I counted the notches in the steering wheel. I looked out the car window. The moon was still there, the stars. Nice and peaceful.

"All right, Johnny," she said. She didn't have to pretend any more, she didn't have to drip sugar. "Johnny, I'm just saving you punishment, for old times' sake. I don't want you to get a bad beating. At the same time, you can make yourself a piece of change."

I was sick at heart. Sheila, whom I had dreamed of these last six months. Every night I had thought: What's she doing? Does she miss me? What a laugh!

She said, "Buzzy will cut you in on the championship fight, if you don't make him extend himself tomorrow night: He can afford to slip you a small fortune. He'll get plenty himself, of course."

"Sheila—why? You and Buzzy, I mean. I had dopey ideas about you and me getting together long enough to go down to City Hall. Why, Sheila?"

Quietly she said, "Buzzy and I were married two months ago, Johnny. We've kept it on the q.t. up to now. Guess we were always stuck on each other."

It was hard to take. She was married. She was Buzzy's. I was out in the cold.

"Tell me, Sheila," I said. "All this acting, at the station, in this car—Buzzy knew what you were trying to do? He sent you?"

Of course, How else—" She stopped short. "No, Johnny, no, I—"

"Baby, that's all I want to know. Buzzy sent you to perform your strip-tease specialty for me. Lieutenant Conroy was right. Buzzy's worried, isn't he?"

"Don't be a fool!" She squirmed in her seat. "You can't beat him."

"Can't?" A mad joy came up inside me. I couldn't control it. It kept singing, "Another shot at Big Joe! A chance to do what no man ever did before, win back the title! A chance to get a million bucks for the boys in the service!"

I snapped open the door. I got out on the road. "Sheila," I said, "Buzzy is scared of the old master. He should be. Go back and tell him that for me."

I slammed the door. Her eyes were on fire in the half-light. She jerked the car into action and was off like a frightened animal. I walked up the road, thinking. I didn't care if I spent the rest of my life in a bughouse showing off my yellow newspaper clippings, shaking fog from inside my head. I didn't care what happened just as long as I sent Buzzy back to her arms on a stretcher. . . .

It's the thirteenth round. Your chest is tight, busting at the seams. Your arms are ready to drop off. You don't feel punches now; your body is one big ache. But you don't care. Buzzy is on the go. You keep talking. The words are not only for Buzzy, but for yourself. It helps to keep your morale up. You see the blood moving about his lips, the white patch on the red background that is his face, and it's good.

"A million bucks, Buzzy. Johnny Elliott and the Champ. Not you, Buzzy. A million bucks and you're not cutting in on it. After tonight you'll come back to me for more lessons, won't you, Buzzy?"

He stops short. He's complaining to the referee. "Foul! He hit me low," he yells. The referee laughs. Everybody laughs.

You know you've got him now. He's wild, crazy wild. He's forgot how to block punches. You hook him once, twice, and he grabs the rope to keep from falling. Talk, talk, fast and snappy. It's been done before. Benny Leonard could talk a guy out of it. So could a dozen others. Now, Johnny Elliott . . .

BUZZY is howling. Stop talking and fight, he says. He's pleading to the referee, to the crowd. Buzzy is in a rage. He's forgot everything his teacher taught him. He's right-hand crazy, throwing punches from the floor. You got him, you got him! Because you've the best left hand in the business. Buzzy sways and clutches atmosphere like a blind man. He backs up but you're on him, feeding him soiled leather. He grabs and holds with desperate strength. You shrug him off. He starts his right again but your left blazes in a short arc. You breathe deep as you go to a neutral corner on wobbly legs.

You look out at the crowd but you see nothing. You're listening to the referee's count. You're praying that Buzzy won't get up. If he does you'll never be able to leave the corner.

He gets up. And you find the extra strength to go out to meet him. You think: Careful, save your strength for the haymaker, set him up first. The next second you've forgot. You send him rocking on his feet from a wild bombardment. You stop short. You have to, you're so tired.

You got one more punch. Make it a good one.

You time it, then you step in with a hook that has a million bucks riding on it. His eyes go flat and dull. He slops over and crumples up in his own corner and you know you've given him back to his handlers and Sheila.

Lieutenant Conroy comes through the ropes. He's full of happy laughter. The whole arena is a madhouse. Lieutenant Conroy throws a robe around your bowed shoulders. He hugs you tight. He's crying. You want to tell him to cut it out, but you're afraid if you open your mouth you'll join him. You flop down on your stool. You begin to wonder if your bad hand will get healed in time to meet Big Joe. You begin thinking: I've got a trick Joe never saw. I know how to beat him . . . win back the title. . . .

THE END



WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT PRESIDENTS?

1. Name the only President born west of the Mississippi.
2. "The tongue, the pen, and the sword of the Revolution" referred to Patrick Henry, to Thomas Jefferson and to whom else?
3. George Washington is the only President who was inaugurated in two cities, neither of which was Washington. Name one.
4. Which President never rode in a Pullman until he was nominated for the vice-presidency, and never owned an automobile until he went to Washington? He first achieved national prominence in a police strike.
5. Identify three of the following: (a) The Great Emancipator (b) The Father of the Constitution (c) Old Rough and Ready (d) Old Hickory.
6. Which Chief Executive bought Louisiana from Napoleon?
7. What Presidents do you connect with the following? Get all but one. (a) Rough riding (b) Remember the Maine (c) Teapot Dome scandal (d) With malice toward none (e) The capital of Wisconsin (f) A chicken in every pot (g) Make the world safe for Democracy.
8. From 1840 to 1920, a jinx pursued all Presidents elected at twenty-year intervals. Name and tell the fate of three of the five.
9. The first President elected on the Republican ticket wrote his most famous speech on the back of an old envelope. He was once a storekeeper. Identify him.
10. He was accused of packing the Supreme Court and of wanting to become a dictator. Lincoln once said of him: "I must find out what brand of whiskey he drinks so I can send a barrel apiece to the other generals." Who was he?

Answers may be found on Page 100.



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